

**Friendship Heights
Transportation Management District
Advisory Committee
Sept. 14, 2010**

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Voting Members Present

Joe Dixon	GEICO
William P. Farley (Chair)	Town of Somerset (brief appearance)
Kerri Gates	The JBG Companies
Tiffany Gee (Vice Chair)	Chevy Chase Land Company
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Ann F. Lewis	Friendship Heights Village
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Robert Schwarzbart	Friendship Heights Village Council

Non-Voting Members Present

Ed Axler	M-NCPPC
Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

TMD Staff Present

Nakengi Byrd	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Sheila Wilson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

Absent

Julie Davis	Somerset House Management Assn.
Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Kenneth Hartman	B-CC Services Center

Guests

Jeff Dunkel	MC DOT/Pedestrian Safety Coordinator
William Haynes	MC DOT/Pedestrian Safety Engineer
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Cobey R. Kuff	Wisconsin Place
Julian Mansfield	Friendship Heights Village
Barbara Tauben	Friendship Heights Village Civic Assn.

Abbreviations used herein include:

Americans with Disabilities Act = ADA
Base Realignment and Closure = BRAC
High Incidence Area = HIA

Item 1 & 2 – Introductions/Minutes Approval: Vice Chair Tiffany Gee called the meeting to order. Members and guests introduced themselves; the July minutes were approved with minor changes.

Item 3 – Chair Comments: Ms. Gee announced the following new members:

Julie Davis – Somerset House Management Association

Kerri Gates – The JBG Companies

Tiffany Gee – The Chevy Chase Land Company

Ann Lewis – Friendship Heights Village

Ms. Gee said there is a pending vote for M-NCPPC representative **Ed Axler**. **Jim Carlson** added there is also a vote pending for **Cobey Kuff**, Wisconsin Place representative.

Ms. Gee welcomed guest **Jeff Dunckel**, Montgomery County's Pedestrian Safety Coordinator.

Item 4 – Pedestrian Safety: **Mr. Dunckel** said he has been the County's Pedestrian Safety Coordinator since June 2008, transferring from the Division of Transit Services where he was in charge of bus passenger facilities. He added that passenger safety is a big part of bus passenger facilities, since bus riders are also pedestrians both before and after their trip. His mission with passenger facilities was to make all Montgomery County bus stops safe and accessible.

Mr. Dunckel distributed County's *Pedestrian County Safety Initiative* booklet (December 2007) to Committee members. The booklet plus other pedestrian safety resources are available at: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/walk.

Mr. Dunckel said he would be joined later in the meeting by **William Haynes**, the County's new Pedestrian Safety Engineer. **Mr. Haynes** deals with site-specific issues. Both he and **Mr. Dunckel** have been made aware of a number of issues in Friendship Heights by local residents. Although the pedestrian safety initiative is a County-wide program, there is a special emphasis upon the more congested urban districts where there is the greatest number of pedestrian / vehicle collisions.

County Executive Leggett's Pedestrian Safety Initiative, which includes seven main strategies, puts into place many of the recommendations of the *Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Blue Ribbon Panel*, established in 2001 by **County Executive Doug Duncan**. The panel was chaired by **Bill Bronrott**, one of the County's strongest advocates for pedestrian safety. The panel's recommendations became the starting point for Mr. Leggett's current initiative.

After his election, **Mr. Leggett** attempted to give some greater definition to the Blue Ribbon Panel's broad recommendations and to target those areas of the County that continued to pose hazardous conditions for pedestrians. He convened a work group that produced the Pedestrian Safety Initiative in 2007. The County Council also strongly supported the initiative.

Mr. Dunckel said that unfortunately political support does not always translate into financial support, so there was very little funding allocated to the program during its first year. **Mr. Dunckel** identified the priority measures in the initiative and finally was successful in getting \$5 million dollars dedicated to pedestrian safety in FY10. The economic downturn and the County's FY10 savings plan took away a substantial portion of this funding, and the FY11 budget has resulted in a 26 percent reduction in funding. The good news is that there is still a program – the bad news is that it is not as robust as it could be.

Mr. Dunckel outlined the seven main strategies in the Pedestrian Safety Initiative:

1. Target pedestrian safety improvements in High Incidence Areas (HIA).: The County uses quantifiable data under the CountyStat program to identify those areas with the greatest concentration of pedestrian / vehicle collisions. There are no HIAs in the Friendship Heights TMD, but there some areas in proximity to Friendship Heights, one of which is in Chevy Chase, on Wisconsin Avenue between Montgomery Avenue and Leland Street. The large number of pedestrian collisions in this area is attributed mainly to drivers not yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks. Areas identified as HIA are audited by an engineering team over a 2-3 day period, looking at morning and evening traffic and pedestrian patterns. Measures employed to improve HIA zones are the three "E's" – engineering, education and enforcement.

[**Mr. Dunckel** introduced **William Haynes**, who arrived during this section of the presentation.]

Engineering measures on state roads must be coordinated with the State Highway Administration (SHA), which has not been as fast as expected in some instances, but progress is being made in the HIAs identified so far by safety audits. Meanwhile, education and enforcement measures are being put into place ahead of the engineering changes.

2. Assess and improve pedestrian network and connectivity needs: **Mr. Dunckel** said this pertains primarily to sidewalk improvement programs. Funding was nearly doubled in FY10 for the construction of sidewalks. The hearing process for sidewalks has recently been modified to facilitate faster construction. The previous procedure to install a sidewalk involved soliciting public comment for each project, which makes sense if a project is controversial; however, most sidewalk projects are non-controversial and receive support from the community, so it doesn't make sense to delay a project for six months or a year. Council passed legislation allowing for the immediate construction of sidewalks in those cases where there is no voiced community objection. One item in this category that did not receive funding was the comprehensive assessment of the County's sidewalk network, to evaluate the overall condition of sidewalks, assess if they are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and other factors. **Mr. Dunckel** said he was optimistic that this item would be funded in FY11 budget.

3. Increase emphasis on pedestrians and bicyclists in the planning process: The County is making a conscious effort to include pedestrian connectivity and safety in all of its planning processes when new projects come on board. **Mr. Dunckel** said **Mr. Haynes's** job is to analyze the pedestrian impact statements projects and identify those areas that need improvement. **Mr. Dunckel** said he and **Mr. Haynes** are working closely with Park and Planning to increase the emphasis on pedestrian safety. **Mr. Haynes** said that in the current environment there isn't always enough money available, so leveraging the funding contribution of developers has become important. The pedestrian safety audits become even more important in this regard, since the recommendations of the audit become part of the development process when a developer moves into the area and wants to build. **Mr. Haynes** said this is an example of how the pedestrian safety strategies are inter-woven development.

4. Identify and implement corridor and intersection modifications and traffic calming treatments: **Mr. Dunckel** said this is traffic calming and where one would see examples of traffic bump-outs, refuge islands, etc. This is being done County-wide, with the most effective example being Arcola Drive, which was narrowed from a five lane road to two lanes, reducing speed to the posted limit. Some residents expressed concern about traffic backups and gridlock, but this did not happen. **Mr. Dunckel** said he observed the road after the changes and noted that nearly all drivers stopped for pedestrians who waited at the crosswalks. The process is not without some controversy. Slowing traffic involves narrowing the roadway which causes problems for bicyclists, so the County is trying to strike a balance between slowing traffic to acceptable levels and allowing adequate space for bikes. Traffic calming measures have been very successful, with most drivers slowing to the posted speed limit. Pedestrian collisions have dropped dramatically as a result of these measures – from three or four collisions to zero. There is more data to be gathered in the long term, but the early indications are very positive.

David Glass asked if the public hearing process described earlier in connection with sidewalks applies to the traffic calming. **Mr. Dunckel** said it did not apply to traffic calming measures. **Mr. Glass** said it would seem to have a greater impact on the public than sidewalk construction. **Mr. Dunckel** said there was an overriding issue of public safety and, like speed humps, which also do not undergo a public comment process, traffic calming measures are put into place when deemed necessary to protect lives. Likewise, there is no public hearing regarding the installation of a crosswalk or a signal at an intersection. These are things that DOT sees as part of its 'traffic envelope'. Sidewalks are also seen as a separate case because typically when the County wants to construct one, it is perceived to be on someone's front yard – and after 30 years or so boundaries tend

to be forgotten or blurred. The Council instituted hearings for sidewalks around nine years ago as a response to several controversial sidewalk projects that impacted residents. **Mr. Dunckel** added that when hearings are added to the process, it can take a year or more to complete a project; and, since traffic calming is seen as a public safety issue, it would further bog down the project when a rapid response is necessary. Predictions from the community on Arcola that the traffic measures would cause gridlock did not come to pass; as a result, the residents are now more positive about the changes and there have been requests from other communities to enact the same type of measures. Recent work on Dale Drive near Mrs. K's Tollhouse in Silver Spring presents an example of community involvement. Residents and bicyclists spoke in favor of narrowing the roadway, including the bicycle lane, because they recognized the advantages of reduced vehicle speed through the neighborhood.

Mr. Glass asked how community support and success is gauged if there are no public hearings. **Mr. Dunckel** said the measure of success in this case is the reduction in the traffic speed. Previous to the traffic calming measures travel speed along Arcola averaged 46 mph when the posted speed was 30 mph. After improvements, most drivers are now going the speed limit and drivers are stopping for people in crosswalks. The goal is to keep drivers to the posted speed limit. So far, there has not been a public outcry from commuters on the speed reduction measures.

Mr. Schwarzbart said one of the problems encountered in the Village of Friendship Heights in dealing with the County is how long it takes for certain things to be done - for example, the installation of speed humps - even when there is local support for them. This is a source of frustration. Also, some years ago, before the present fiscal difficulties, the Village wanted to post Yield to Pedestrian signs along Willard Avenue which is a County road, at the various intersections where there were no signals. The County did a number of lengthy traffic studies; in the end the County concluded that if there were pedestrian refuge islands at the intersections, then the signs could not be placed there but had to be installed in the middle of the block. **Mr. Dunckel** said he is curious about the study conclusions, since it is now common practice to put safety 'paddles' on all pedestrian islands. **Mr. Dunckel** asked how long ago the study was done; Village Manager **Julian Mansfield** said he was not sure but that it had been at least a few years. **Mr. Schwarzbart** said as a result of the earlier study the County took away a number of parking spaces along Willard Avenue. This was to accommodate persons in wheelchairs who could not see vehicles coming from River Road.

Mr. Dunckel said the County's model for pedestrian safety has changed in recent years, marked by the hiring of **William Haynes**, who is a full time pedestrian safety engineer. Although the earlier study done on Willard may have recommended pedestrian safety signs at the mid-block, more recent studies now call for the signs to be placed on pedestrian refuge islands which clearly marks a crossing zone. **Mr. Haynes** distributed his card to the Committee and remarked that, in connection with the pedestrian refuge islands currently on Willard Avenue that need pedestrian safety signs, he would follow up.

5. Upgrade pedestrian signals: **Mr. Dunckel** said he has received the most calls regarding this issue, some from Friendship Heights residents. The current signal timing assumes an average walk time of four feet per second, which for some people is a challenge; there is a plan underway, not yet implemented, to change the pedestrian walk time to 3.5 feet per second, in effect lengthening the time allotted for crossing the street by several seconds. Changing the signal timing even for a few seconds affects commute travel times and can increase congestion, so the change is being coordinated with the District. The District signal system is coordinated with the County's up to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) area in Bethesda.

The state has been accessible pedestrian signals at major intersections. When these changes are put into effect, there is also a change in signal sequencing.

Bill McCloskey said the Committee had been trying for a number of months to get the signal on Western Avenue at the Geico entrance to switch to flash mode in the evening after most Geico employees have left. The

District enabled flashing on just one evening and then the signal reverted back to full cycle. **Mr. McCloskey** asked if **County Executive Leggett** ever spoke directly to **DC Mayor Adrian Fenty**, since the Committee has had a very difficult time getting a response from the District on traffic issues. The Committee's last guest, **DOT Director Art Holmes**, indicated he did not have an ongoing relationship with his counterpart in the District but that he would be willing to contact him if needed.

Mr. Dunckel said that he has a working relationship with his District counterpart; and **Will Haynes**, who lives in the District, also has a relationship with District engineers. Currently, **Mr. Haynes and Mr. Dunckel** are working with their District counterparts on an issue at the 16th Street Circle.

Mr. Carlson said he was surprised to hear the Western Avenue signal went back to full cycle, having viewed a number of emails recently indicating the issue had been resolved. **Mr. McCloskey** reiterated that the signal flashed for one day and then reset to full cycle. **Mr. Carlson** said he would again call **Jeff Marootian**, his DC contact, to follow up. **Mr. Dunckel** said the County and District do work together on signal synchronization, but he doesn't know the specifics and which signals are jointly operated. He continued that the Geico signal may be been tripped by an electrical malfunction and defaulted to its previous setting.

Barbara Tauben, the Friendship Heights Village Association, said in her committee's communication with the state regarding signal issues along Wisconsin Avenue, the state has said the County is responsible for the signals, while at other times the County has indicated the state has jurisdiction. **Ms. Tauben** asked for some clarification. **Mr. Dunckel** said there is no easy answer to the jurisdiction issue; the state maintains jurisdiction over the signals on state roads but in some instances has turned over responsibility for signal operation to county jurisdictions. The best point of contact for signal issues is the County, which can then follow up with the state if necessary. This can be done as a 311 call.

Mr. Haynes added that if it is a signal timing issue it is usually under the County's purview, even on a state road. The planning and construction of a signal, or anything related to its physical condition (such as a leaning pole) is typically a state issue.

Ms. Tauben explained a signal issue at South Park and Wisconsin. There are two left turn signals at the intersection coordinating north-south traffic on Wisconsin, and east-west along South Park. The problem at the intersection may be with signal timing, since there is a significant delay before the left turn signal activates. The delay encourages jay walking – pedestrians waiting to cross north or south on South Park get impatient and start to cross just as the left turn signal on Wisconsin activates, causing a potential collision with left turning vehicles. Which jurisdiction has responsibility for the timing of the signal? **Mr. Haynes** said it sounded like it something the County would look at. He added that it is a common reaction for pedestrians to assume it is OK to cross the street once the traffic has stopped, but they tend to forget about the turn phase of the signal. The signal should indicate no crossing at this time. Signals also have an 'all red' phase just before the next phase begins. **Ms. Tauben** wondered if the all red phase was functioning normally.

[Mr. Haynes subsequently analyzed the signal timing and found it to be operating normally]

Mr. Schwarzbart noted that most of the traffic problems in Friendship Heights relate to Wisconsin Avenue. With the departure of **Bill Bronrott** from the House of Delegates, who championed pedestrian safety issues, how much influence does the County now have with the state on these issues? **Mr. Dunckel** said the County was developing a good collaborative relationship with the state. We cannot always get the state to do everything the County wants done, or as quickly as we would like it to be, but it is improving. **Mr. Haynes's** job is to provide a liaison to the state for traffic issues and he has been working very hard with the state on alleviating the hazardous conditions at the County's HIAs and targeting other issues on state roads. **Mr. Dunckel** said that overall the relationship with the state was moving in a positive direction.

Mr. Schwarzbart said another issue that had been pursued with the state was to add a left turn or northbound arrow from Willard Avenue onto Wisconsin. That could have been coordinated with a second turn arrow for southbound Wisconsin traffic turning from Wisconsin Circle. Now, when cars exit Willard onto Wisconsin, they encounter vehicles coming the opposite way from Wisconsin Circle; having coordinated left turn arrows would reduce the chance for conflict. **Mr. Glass** said there was a good reason for prohibiting left turns from Wisconsin Circle, as is presently the case, because it would cause traffic backups on Western Avenue. **Ms. Tauben** said she would forward to **Mr. Haynes** information and responses from recent State Highway Administration (SHA) studies of Wisconsin Avenue.

Mr. Glass added that most of the issues pertaining to pedestrian safety, particularly in the Wisconsin/Willard intersection, have to do with jaywalking and people ignoring the signals. **Mr. Dunkel** agreed that there is only so much engineering and enforcement that can be done; education is also a key element. The County has had success with its “Street Smart” campaign in its high incidence areas, targeting the pedestrian safety message to where it is most needed. The County is using a bilingual approach in areas with a large Hispanic population. There are also pockets in communities with other languages that the County needs to reach.

Mr. Haynes added that it is a mistake to think the immigrant community can’t understand the traffic signals or laws. Recent work by the County reveals that it is familiarity that tends to drive risk taking behavior – those who have been here the longest are the most likely to ignore traffic and pedestrian rules.

Mr. Dunkel noted that the 2009 collision data has been collected and is being analyzed by a person recently hired for that purpose. **Ms. Tauben** added that previous data released by the County has been very useful and easy to read and comprehend, with good use of graphics. **Mr. Dunkel** said program statistics can be accessed through the CountyStat web site: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/countystat.

[Due to time constraints the remaining two Pedestrian Safety Strategies, “Assess and Enhance Street Lighting” and “Modify Pedestrian and Driver Behavior through Enhanced Enforcement and Educational Efforts” were not covered. Further information is available in the booklet distributed at the meeting.]

Ms. Gee asked if there were any additional questions and thanked **Mr. Dunkel** and **Mr. Haynes** for their presentation.

Mr. Haynes distributed his business cards to Committee members and asked that they contact him for specific issues related to pedestrian or traffic safety. **Ms. Brecher** asked that members contact **Jim Carlson**, who will forward their concerns.

Item 5 – Updates: **Mr. Carlson** called attention to flyers announcing “Car Free Day” on September 22nd. Commuter Services staff will be at two Park & Ride Lots on that morning with free coffee and donuts for commuters: Kingsview Park & Ride in Gaithersburg; and Burtonsville Crossing Park & Ride in Silver Spring. Staff will be on site from 6 AM to 8:30 AM. The County’s contractors for the Bethesda and North Bethesda TMDs will be at the Bethesda and White Flint Metro stations.

Ms. Brecher circulated a copy of the Montgomery County Transportation Options for Seniors and People with Disabilities, which is being revised. **Ms. Brecher** will have the person working on the revisions send an electronic version to **Mr. Carlson** for distribution to the group for comments.

Ms. Brecher announced that ridership is down once again on Ride On. The division is trying to assess the reasons; recent fare increases and service cuts may have something to do with it. Ride On will be putting out an announcement for the holiday schedule for Veteran’s Day, Martin Luther King Day and Presidents’ Day. There will be a separate schedule for the holidays. Ride On is implementing a new route scheduling system called Trapeze which has just gone into effect with the September service change, called the “pick.” Ms. Brecher also

described Ride On's "S" service plan, put into place last year. The S service is used for snowstorms, other weather events, or when service is unexpectedly disrupted. Buses will run but not on a specific time on the S schedule. The County will endeavor to keep all routes operational in the event of service disruption, although the timing and frequency of buses will change.

Ms. Brecher said the County is working on its off-year capital improvements program – there will not be many elements funded under the program.

The County's technology staff reports the top six key word searches for the County all have Ride On listed in the title. Ride On is one of the things people most want information about.

Ms. Brecher said Ride On is searching for new bus drivers. The training process is fairly rigorous and not everyone is selected. Driver turnover tends to be high, plus there is attrition through retirement.

The County will be participating with Montgomery County at its Rockville campus to promote "Bike to College Day" in conjunction with "Car Free Day" on September 22nd.

The County's car sharing initiative is on track. Vendor proposals have been submitted and are being evaluated. **Ms. Brecher** explained that this is the initiative to provide car sharing spaces on the street and in public garages and lots. The specific spaces have not been identified. Once a vendor is selected the County will work with the company to select spaces. **Mr. Glass** what selection criteria were used for the vendors. **Ms. Brecher** said she could provide that information, since it is in the public domain.

Mr. Carlson thanked **Ms. Gee** for providing meeting refreshments.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM
Next meeting date: Oct. 12, 2010